

Gas Sales Barred In Lithuanian Crisis

Moscow's Pressure 'Taking a Real Toll'

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, May 22—The Lithuanian leadership banned the sale of gasoline to private car owners today and made plans to shut off power to numerous industrial plants later this week as part of an effort to lessen the impact of Moscow's economic blockade of the republic.

A spokesman at the Lithuanian legislature said the effects of the blockade, which Moscow began early last month to force the republic to suspend its March 11 declaration of independence, had "reached crisis proportions. It's taking a real toll now."

The parliamentary leaders also drafted a resolution saying the legislature will suspend all bills and actions resulting from the declaration of independence as soon as negotiations with Moscow begin. Deputies expect that the resolution will pass Wednesday.

While Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has demanded that the declaration itself be suspended as a precondition for talks on Lithuania's political status, the Lithuanian leadership and the vast majority of deputies have said the declaration is not negotiable.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis declined to come to Moscow for today's meeting of the Federation Council, one of the two cabinets that advises Gorbachev. Landsbergis said he saw no point in coming to Moscow if he was unable to meet with Gorbachev to discuss the situation in Lithuania.

Latvian President Anatolijs Gorbunovs and Estonian President Arnold Ruutel did have a 20-minute private session with Gorbachev here but made no progress in setting up negotiations on the independence of the three Baltic states. Baltic sources said Gorbachev told Ruutel and Gorbunovs that all three republics must suspend their declarations of independence before there could be any negotiations. Ruutel told the Estonian News Service that the meeting was "unpleasant" for both sides.

For weeks, the Lithuanians have predicted that the blockade in the republic would reach a critical point just as Gorbachev was preparing to

meet with President Bush in Washington. That has turned out to be the case.

Algirdas Brazauskas, the Lithuanian Communist Party leader and a deputy prime minister, said gasoline supplies had run so low because of the blockade that sales would now be limited to food delivery trucks, first aid vehicles and the police. Public transport routes would be cut drastically. As a result of the gasoline reductions, Brazauskas estimated that 23,000 drivers in the republic would be temporarily unemployed. There are already 32,700 people out of work as a result of the pressure from Moscow.

The parliament's committee on anti-blockade measures said the republic's main electrical plant at Elektrėnai, outside the capital, Vilnius, also will close because of a lack of fuel, putting a heavier burden on the nuclear power generator at Ignalina.

Fuel shortages also have meant that hot water has become rare in Lithuania. Soon only medical facilities will be assured of hot water supplies, a spokesman said.

Brazauskas charged Moscow with trying to increase the division between the republic's Lithuanian and Russian communities by showing economic favoritism. He said according to information provided by the Council of Ministers, Moscow was channeling extra food supplies through Byelorussia to three districts of Lithuania that are heavily populated with Russians and Poles.

In Estonia, protest strikes by Russians at industrial plants, coal mines and ports entered a second day. But a spokesman for the Estonian government said the strikes have been limited and have not taken a serious economic toll on the republic.

[In Stockholm, Lithuanian Vice President Česlovas Stankevičius said some city dwellers may be evacuated to the countryside to save energy and food, the Associated Press reported. Estonian Foreign Minister Lennert Meri, speaking at a seminar sponsored by Sweden's Institute of Foreign Affairs, said Estonia and Latvia are making preparations "to receive workers from Lithuania." Stankevičius, Meri and Latvian Vice President Dainis Ivans issued a joint appeal for diplomatic recognition and aid.]